



March

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The 1999 Transportation Research Board Meeting

Written by Kristi Swisher with information provided by George Fekaris

The 78th annual meeting of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) was held this year on January 10-14 in Washington, D.C. at the Marriott Wardman Park, Omni Shoreham, and Hilton Washington Hotels. The event was open to anyone involved in the transportation business and was attended by over 8000 representatives from private industry, consultant groups, and federal and local agencies. Approximately 1900 presentations in nearly 500 concurrent sessions ran from 8:00 am to 8 pm (and sometimes later) at each of the three hotels. Interspersed amongst the sessions were 19 specialty workshops, 200 committee meetings, and several distinguished lectures and evening receptions. A sampling of actual topics picked at random from the final program is as follows:

Measurement and Characterization of Physical Properties of Asphalt Binders
 Corrosion of Bridge Main Cable Stay Elements: Cable Stay Bridges
 Travel Behavior Patterns of Older Adults
 Railroad-Highway Grade Crossings
 Technology and Airport Terminals/Access
 Global Positioning System (GPS) Applications and Issues
 Bus Transit Issues
 Risk Management and Evaluation in Tunnel Construction
 Property Rights Movement and Transportation: When Agency Actions Constitute a Taking
 Cyberlaw: Emerging Legal Issues
 Traffic Control Devices on Major Highways
 Judicial Review of NEPA Decisions and timing of Agency Actions
 Subcommittee on Natural Resources
 Task Force on Transportation Needs for National Parks and Public Lands



Federal Highway Administration



“I was just incredibly impressed,” notes George Fekaris, Environmental Engineer at the Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) in Vancouver, WA. George attended the conference along with Cal Frobigh and Kerry Cook, also from WFLHD. George found that his most daunting task was to select only a handful of events each day from the many hundreds of events offered. Overall, George found that the sessions were well-run and very interesting. The attendance varied from 30 to over 1000 people, depending on the size of the room and the topic. Rodney Slater’s presentation was an example of an event that was held in a large auditorium and overflowed to standing-room-only capacity.

One of the most valuable aspects of the session for George was the opportunity to sit in on several “cutting edge” task force meetings involved in issues very pertinent to his everyday work life. George found it stimulating to be in the same room with the people who wrote the guidelines for the *American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials* manual and with others who are drafting the new policy on low-volume roads. In addition, there was an opportunity to sit in on judicial reviews and legal sessions.

“Probably the most exciting aspect of the session was the incredible networking opportunity,” George says. George met many interesting people, among them, a Greek consultant who chuckled when he looked at American road projects and the lack of true “history” in the artifacts and sites we encounter. In Greece, the cultural resources are hundreds of years older than those found in America, and rarely is a shovel full of dirt turned over without finding something of cultural significance. The Greeks are very aware of cultural resource issues and follow a strict set of protocols to minimize damage to sites.

George found the presentation by the Environmental Section of the New York Department of Transportation (NYDOT) to be very intriguing. Apparently, the NYDOT has developed an initiative to go above and beyond the normal permit requirements for environmental impacts and are asking local groups and agencies how they can help with community projects. The NYDOT wants to take off their black hats and develop more of a “good guy” image in the public eye. They found that formal wetland banking has not been very successful, but with this new “let’s do the right thing” approach, an informal understanding has developed that has greatly streamlined the permit process. Local groups and agencies actually call the NYDOT about upcoming projects and are eager participants from the start. Examples of construction projects that are proposed or were completed in Fiscal Year 1998-99 are as follows (taken from the NYDOT Environmental Initiative Statement document that was handed out at the conference):

- Improve water quality and wildlife habitat by modifying the recharge basin outfall to Connetquot Brook to increase storm water detention in the Town of Islip in Suffolk County. The project will prevent sudden highway sediment discharges from impacting the trout stream and Connetquot River State Park. Construction will be incorporated into ongoing highway work on the Long Island Expressway. Estimated cost is \$50,000.
- Provide fishing access and improve fish habitat at Butternut Creek along Interstate 481 at Jamesville Road in the Town of Dewitt. Work will include a parking facility for 10 cars, fencing and signs. Access to the streambed will be made easier by regrading a ramp on the east side of the creek. Habitat improvements will be made, including replanting. Estimated cost is \$20,000.

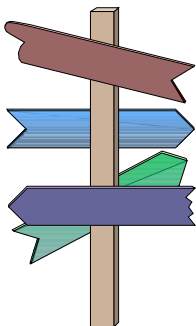
- Construct 1.5 acres of wetlands on a NYDOT-owned five-acre parcel adjacent to West Canada Creek in the vicinity of the recently replaced Flansburg Bridge. The project is being completed with the cooperation of the Adirondack Park Agency and is located entirely within Adirondack Park. Estimated cost is \$152,000.
- Improve a bikeway trail for recreational purposes adjacent to the Erie Canal from Utica Marsh to Route 291. The NYDOT will recycle asphalt to improve the surface of the bike trail. Construction will be coordinated with work performed by the New York State Canal Corporation. Estimated cost is \$140,000.
- As part of a project through the Village of Saranac Lake, the NYDOT will extend Depot Street to provide access to the historic Union Depot and provide landscape development, including pedestrian walkways and plazas, period lighting, benches, plantings, and the burying of utilities. This work is coordinated with the Saranac Village Historical Society and the Village of Saranac Lake. Estimated cost is \$150,000.

Some whopper projects that are currently under development include (1) construction of 2020-foot embankment along the shoreline of Lake Ontario to protect a wetland and to provide public access and wildlife viewing areas - \$500,000; (2) reconstruction of Route 9 as it enters Saratoga Springs through the Saratoga State Park to reflect the Park's historic and recreational values - \$750,000; and (3) donation of \$750,000 to restore Shermans Creek wetland and to create community gardens along Harlem River Drive.

The inevitable question was asked as to how the NYDOT handles the additional costs involved with the extra work. The NYDOT's answer? They simply pointed out that the extra environmental work has cost them \$4 million dollars so far, a very small, worthwhile chunk of the \$4 BILLION dollars allotted in the transportation budget.

Of the thousands of people who attended the conference, at least one walked away happy. George highly recommends the conference, and given the wide range of topics, feels certain that the event holds something for everyone involved in transportation.

ROAD SIGNS



"The man who views the world at 50 the same as he did at 20
has wasted 30 years of his life."

—Muhammad Ali

We wish to thank all the individuals who have contributed articles for previous newsletters. If you are aware of a new technology, (or a fresh spin on an old one) please jot down your ideas and submit them via e-mail to me at the address below. Or, if you have an aversion to writing, just donate 15 minutes of your time for an interview (either by phone or in person), and I'll format the information for you. You can then review the article for accuracy (via e-mail or hard copy) and upon publication, you'll become famous in a matter of days. Remember, although we cater to road-related technology, ANY new technology information is welcome.

Please send all submissions to Kristi Swisher - (360.696.7572). Be sure your name, title, and phone number are the way you want them to appear in the article. Articles are subject to editor/ layout approval and may be condensed if space is limited.

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